



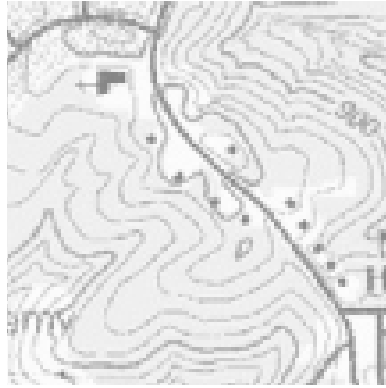
A Score for Taking Place



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**Mary Stuart Hall
2021**

Emerging from the bend in the South River, fourteen musicians play a disorienting version of *American the Beautiful*. The familiar melody, disturbed by the chromatic chords, unsettles the



listener. This intervention, called *Taking Place*¹, is part protest, part call to action, and part memorial for the lives lost in this land that is layered with a painful and bloody history.

¹ *We express the dance between space and time through the language we use to frame our experience of both. Taking place commonly refers to an occurrence rather than the act of possessing space, but perhaps it is not accidental that the phrase folds in an understanding of the spatial dimension of time. The event itself is created by its own spatial manifestation. In contrast however, there is way of viewing the cross section of space that stops time. Duration is required for space to exist, but stillness is required for*

The space of the Old Atlanta Prison Farm encapsulates the history of colonial oppression and the resulting violence that has been the foundational event of the United States. Originally occupied by the Muscogee Creek tribe before their forceable removal and relocation to the Muscogee Creek Nation Reservation in Oklahoma², the land was subsequently the site of a civil war battle. After the war ended the land was parsed out to state and local governments who absorbed the land as they amassed their territorial³ coffers. Finally the 300 acre parcel bore witness to the atrocities of forced convict labor as the Atlanta Honor Farm.

understanding the relational experiences that constitute the material of space.

² *“On the far end of the Trail of Tears was a promise. Forced to leave their ancestral lands in Georgia and Alabama, the Creek Nation received assurances that their new lands in the West would be secure forever. In exchange for ceding “all their*





Since that period it has been abused and taken advantage of by the city of Atlanta. It has been a reservoir for the unwanted detritus of a municipality unable to confront its refuse. It is impossible not to see the most recent plans for the land to house a police training facility as another notch in the bedpost of a violent narrative. Understanding the historical utility of

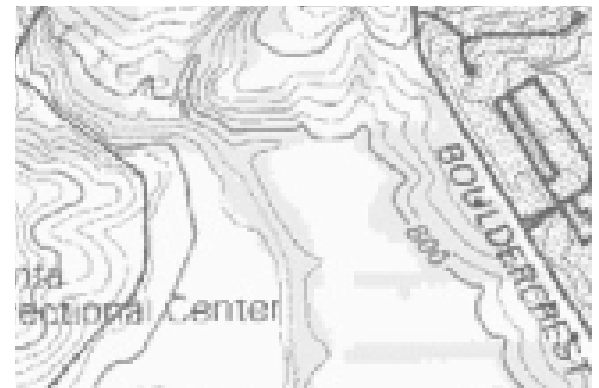
land, East of the Mississippi river,” the U. S. government agreed by treaty that “[t]he Creek country west of the Mississippi shall be solemnly guaranteed to the Creek Indians.” Treaty With the Creeks, Arts. I, XIV, Mar. 24, 1832, 7 Stat. 366, 368 (1832 Treaty). Both parties settled on boundary lines for a new and “permanent home to the whole Creek nation,” located in what is now Oklahoma. Treaty With the Creeks, preamble, Feb. 14, 1833, 7 Stat. 418 (1833 Treaty). The government further promised that “[no] State or Territory [shall] ever have a right to pass laws for the government of such Indians, but they shall be

the land is only one way of consolidating its complexity. The overlapping and intersecting spaces merge its history and resulting consequences in a way that demonstrates the narrative line between our racist past and our racist present. Rather than focus on the linear trajectory of history, examining space from the global present frames the dynamic intersection of time and space that is neither present or past.⁴

allowed to govern themselves.” 1832 Treaty, Art. XIV, 7 Stat. 368.

Today we are asked whether the land these treaties promised remains an Indian reservation for purposes of federal criminal law. Because Congress has not said otherwise, we hold the government to its word.” —Justice Gorsuch

³ *We have a specific way of understanding territory in America that is absolute, a fence that determines who has the right to step foot on our land. Real estate attorneys will tell you that property rights are a bundle of sticks, made up of rights to resources as well as the geographic space of land. In America, it’s a bundle that is uniquely individual within the context of alternative understandings of land ownership.*



³*The idea of owning land has grown from various traditions including a feudal system in a European context and completely different understanding of the relationship between land its occupant to be one of obligation to the land in an indigenous context. Not only does our understanding of territory insist on total physical occupation of the space, our country was built upon turning that space into capital. The idea that land could provide a security in exchange for value, has driven the American project of manifest destiny always marching towards more.*

⁴*“Conceiving of space as a static slice through time, as representation, as a closed system and so forth are all ways of taming it. They enable us to ignore its real import: the coeval multiplicity of other trajectories and the necessary outward-lookingness of a specialised subjectivity.” Doreen Massey, For Space p.59*
“Unlike time, it seems, you can see space spread out around you. Time is either past or to come so minutely instantaneously now that it is impossible

When conceiving of this project, I began thinking of the musicians as an earnest group of players that have been circling the boundary since the time of the honor farm. Perhaps they have been “beating the bounds”⁵ for so long that their song has gone out of tune. Still, there is some important ambiguity embodied in their purpose. They could be there to announce an army of forest defenders or to illustrate the futility of the boundary between the property owned by the city of Atlanta and Dekalb county, using their song to permeate both. Sound has a way of creating space that breaches the walls of architecture and political borders. The presence of the vibrations is a proof of life that won’t be contained even if the space is traded and passed between competing interests.



to grasp. Space, on the other hand, in there. One immediate and evident effect of this is that space comes to seem so very much more material than time. Temporality seems easy to imagine in the abstract, as a dimension, as the dimension of change. Space, in contrast, has been equated with ‘extension’, and through that with material. [...] it is the landscape outside the window, the surface of the earth, a given.” Massey For Space p. 117



The creation of a territory requires more than a piece of paper to prove ownership. There is a way being in relationship to the space that creates a place. The birds create their territory with song, but that way of taking up space is temporary, a way of saying I'm here in this place for now. The damage done by the song of the bulldozers is permanent. Although a field wants to become a forest, the ecosystems that have persisted through the complicated social history of the land are no match for the potential destruction at the hand of industry. Taking place is more than an event or an act of possession. It's a way of understanding

⁵ *Beating the bounds is an English tradition that used an annual perambulation of the church property to create a mentally inscribed map. The boundary markers were beaten with boughs of birch and willow. Even the young boys of the parish were beaten so that they would never forget the edge of the property. While this means of maintaining a boundary was*

the competing interests for a space that is shared, shared across historical time and shared through competing occupants so that the fluidity of its expression is challenged. The 400 acres of land in Southeast Atlanta can be many things at one time, but our desire to delineate those entities, to eliminate the simultaneity of experience in favor of subdividing the land such that our mutual experience of the place is in jeopardy, marginalizes everyone including those who wish to occupy the place.



made irrelevant by the modern survey, the idea of creating an ongoing memory of a place as a means of actively engaging with its perimeter is in contrast to the dominant modern line of demarcation made absolute by sanctity of the measurement. The modern boundary is ordained by the map rather than a relational experience of those who create the space.

Taking Place Musicians

Amy Beatty

Chuck Bestle

Mary Alice Bestle

Charles Bohanan

Cindia Cameron

Jeff Curry

Catherine Fox

Whatley Fenlon

Lane Hunter

Tom Kelley

Jeremy Malone

Heather Mello

Jeff Smith

San Torres

**With deep gratitude to everyone
who helped me realize this project**

Misao Cates

Stephen D'Andrea

Mollie Fenlon

Whately Fenlon

Mary Perrin

Patricia Pichardo

Greg Pond

Daniel Solammon

**For more information on
how you can get involved**

www.savetheoldatlantaprisonfarm.org

www.stoptheswap.org

@defendatlantaforest on Instagram

www.marystuarhall.com

